



A life-changing decision

My story of mastering a foreign language began last year when I made the life-changing decision - to move to Leuven in Belgium. My goal was to enrol in a university and embark on the next phase of my life as a student. As a high school student at the time, I had no clear direction and never imagined going abroad or living there. So when I heard about the opportunity to study abroad, it felt like something beyond my dreams. I just slowly became aware that it can be real for me if I try. "I have nothing to lose, let's try it". I knew I needed to enhance my language skills and achieve the necessary band score, which meant taking a gap year. Determined, I began to plan for the following year, which involved taking English courses and saving money to afford them. I decided to take two courses at the same time.

The next thing was to find a job. I soon realized that without knowledge of Dutch, my options were limited. The period of finding a job felt endless, with countless rejections leaving me doubting whether I would ever find employment. It lasted until I came across a cleaning company. It wasn't my dream job, but I saw it as an opportunity to get to know Belgian culture and to earn money easily. While the first semester passed with me experiencing new things in my life—making friends abroad, working, and most significantly, living away from my country and family home, the second semester proved to be more challenging, involving not 100% but 120% of my efforts and time. It forced me to make a difficult decision - I had to resign from my job.

Determined to make significant progress, I enrolled in 3 English courses: one that I needed to repeat (upon the teacher's recommendation, given my marginal passing grade), a level 7 course, and an intensive IELTS preparation course. At the end of the second semester, I not only passed all of my courses but also received encouraging feedback on my progress. Regarding the IELTS exam, I was grappling with an overwhelming sense of stress and dedicated countless hours to practising and revising as the exam date approached. The pressure of performing well and achieving my desired score weighed heavily on me. Every day was filled with intense practice sessions and study, leaving me mentally and emotionally drained. Despite the challenges, I remained determined, pushing myself to the limit in order to face the exam with confidence.

During this entire period, I made friends with people from different corners of the world and their presence added enjoyment to my learning journey. Having classmates with similar goals made the classes more engaging. Also, I observed a remarkable transformation within my personality. Confidence was the major change. However, I also battled with negative thoughts, comparing my language skills to those of others. Additionally, I started forgetting words in my native language, which left me confused. Despite all these challenges, I refused to give up—I was determined to reach my goals because my future centred around my university awaiting my arrival and was filled with anticipation for the possibilities that lie ahead.

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